Introduction

This paper explores what Sheryl WuDunn, author of *Half the Sky*, calls our “Century's Greatest Injustice,” gender based inequalities. In the last half-century, more girls were discriminated to death than all the people killed on all the battlefields in the 20th century (2009). The issue of gender inequality in relation to Islam is of an even greater pressing need to be studied. According to the World Economic Forum, “Most of the Arab world continues to perform far below the global average in gender equality, but have also not shown much improvement or have deteriorated.” This research seeks to examine the factors that have influenced the degradation and improvement of gender equality in these countries which continually perform poorly.

Literature Review

The study of Islam and its effect on democratic values, specifically gender equality, is parochial in nature. There is an even smaller empirical discussion on Political Islam (defined as shari’a law). In this study Political Islam is defined as the cohesion of church and state, shari’a law (Hirschkind 1997). This study will discuss how Islam (in the traditional interpretation of the variable) affects gender inequality, and then discuss the few studies which explore Political Islam’s effects on the dependent variable. The effect of Islam on gender inequality in previous scholarly works can be organized into three discourses: Islamic states maintain patriarchy which impedes the democratization processes for gender equality (i.e. universal suffrage, participation); Islam produces a political culture that is not compatible with gender equality; Islam impedes economic development. First we will discuss previous findings of the typologies. Then, we will discuss apropos control variables within the literature.

Islam, Democracy, and Gender Equality

The first discourse states that Islamic states maintain patriarchy which impedes the process of democracy and gender equality. This argument is predominately theoretical but it has received some empirical analysis. The findings produce a common theme that argues countries which have higher percentages of
Muslim’s in the population have a positive and statistically significant association with non-democracies, such as autocratic regimes. Fish (2002) posits that these factors contribute to Islam’s tendency towards authoritarian regimes (9). Donno and Russett (2004) build off of this argument and conclude that Arab countries which are Islamic are more likely to practice the suppression of women and authoritarian regimes. They found that Islamic countries are generally more likely to repress some rights of women than non-Islamic countries (political rights, economic activity, health, and educational attainment) (2). They posit that political culture may be the result of the association between Arab countries and gender inequality. However, they do not fully develop this hypothesis and leave it open for further speculation.

Islam, Political Culture, and Gender Equality

The second discourse states that Islam produces a political culture not compatible with democratic values (such as gender in an empirical survey). This argument is perhaps most famously rooted in (Huntington 1993) cultural divisions between Western Christianity and Islam that establishes a fault line for conflicting interests. Inglehart and Norris (2003), in an empirical survey, conclude that predominately Muslim countries have a strong statistical significance with gender inequality, specifically attitudes of divorce, abortion, gender equality, and gay rights. They note that wanting democratic values is not something inherently Western, the divergence is within the adaptation of such values. The scholars posit that economic development has changed attitudes in every society (2).

The abundance of gender inequality is also strongly reflected in a society as it develops. For example, modernization compels systematic changes in gender roles by bringing women into the work force, and through the development of postindustrial period women who have the capacity to attain higher income and employment (9). This is why the scholars note, that we see such a dramatic difference of political culture in Muslim countries such as Turkey (10). Jamal and Tessler (2006) support the findings of Inglehart and Norris (2003) and conclude through an empirical survey that economic issues are central to understanding how political culture is developed.

Islam, Economic Development, and Gender Equality

This discourse hypothesizes that Islam impedes economic development, which increases levels of gender inequality (Moghadam 2005; Hunter 2005). Researchers conclude that a lack of investment flows, and low levels of industrialization result in gender inequality. This is reflective of low levels of women participating in the work force and high levels of unemployment. However, Ross (2008) concludes that the association between gender inequalities in Muslim majority populations is attributed to the abundance of oil. High levels of oil production, especially in Muslim states, reduce the number of women in the labor force, which reduces their political influence. This is a combination of patriarchal norms found in Islam and the ability of oil production to maintain that structure.
Political Islam and Gender Equality

Analysis of political Islam (shari’a law) and its effect on gender equality can be found in a multitude of descriptive case studies (Bakht 2004; Mashhour 2005; Coleman 2006; Higgins 1985) and normative argumentation. These studies provide unique insight into countries that practice forms of shari’a law but are parochial in that their discussion often becomes descriptive and the generalizability of their findings is ambiguous. Few studies have examined this association cross-nationally. Rahman (2009) finds statistical significance that the influence of shari’a law influences higher levels of gender inequality, specifically in regards to women’s seats held in parliament and female literacy rates (13). There is an immense need to explore the quantification of aspects previously ignored in quantifying Islam’s influence, specifically shari’a law. This gap in the literature is perhaps addressed most accurately by Kandyioti (1991), “studies on women in Muslim societies have not always acknowledged the extent to which aspects of state practice define and mediate the place of Islam itself.”

Significant control variables in the study of political Islam and gender inequality largely reflect the similar controls used in traditional conceptualizations of Islam. Control variables that have been found to be relevant within the literature are ethnic fragmentation (Nieburg 1969; Poe and Tate 1994); oil (Ross 2008); colonialism (Mitchell and McCormick 1998; Poe, Tate, and Keith 1999); and economic development, as discussed previously (Moghadam 2005; Inglehart and Welzel 2003; Hunter 2005). In this study the quantification of gender inequality contains measures which reflect gender gaps in gross domestic product per capita. This control variable will not be included for the purpose of avoiding multicollinearity and will be discussed further in the operationalization. This study will also include a control variable for culture as posited by Donno and Russet (2004) and Deegan (2005).

Theory

The theory behind the effect of Political Islam on gender inequality is composed of two discourses: Islam impedes democracy thus impeding gender inequality (Islam → levels of democracy → levels of gender inequality) and contrastingly, Islam impedes gender inequality, which affects levels of democracy (Islam → gender inequality → levels of democracy). Political Islam can be defined as the cohesion of church and state (Hirschkind 1997). This term is debatable but for the purposes of this study, it has been limited to the above mentioned.

The contention that Islam impedes democracy and thus, gender inequality has empirically been found to be statistically significant for a multitude of factors. Theoretically, the association of Islam, democracy, and thus gender inequality has been attributed to the lack of secularism, and lack of universal sovereignty. Huntington (1984) and Rahman (1983) attribute this association to the lack of secularism. Huntington argues that in Islam (as quantified by a Muslim majority within a country) there exists no distinction between religion and politics, spiritual and secular. This characteristic makes Islam a “consummatory culture.” This is a
culture where intermediate goals and end goals are closely connected, such as in Islam with the elimination of secularization. This argumentation is furthered by the contention that shari’a violates universal sovereignty by supplementing this sovereignty through God (Addi 1992; Kedourie 1994; Ehteshami and Sidahmed 1996; Lewis 1996; Abukhalil 1997; Rahman 2009). This “violation of sovereignty” occurs primarily through interpretations of Ulema, Islamic legal scholars (Prince 1996, 161). Due to Islam’s effect on democracy this then impedes gender inequality (Fukuyama 1992; Ziai 1997; Moghadam 2004; Rahman 1983).

Political Islam or shari’a laws infringements on gender equality are founded from the following arguments: shari’a law ignores individual rights, ignores rights of minorities, and impedes equal status between men and women. The avoidance of individual rights in aspects of shari’a law has been explained by its theoretical emphasis on communal rights (Barlow 2008; Rahman 1983). Some interpretations of Islam value the rights of an entire community over the individual. This is based upon a structure of hierarchy within a community, supporting a system in which individuals have differing roles. Certain roles in each community are considered of greater importance than others. This produces different laws and regulations for individuals in each community, specifically the roles of men and women in regards to family structures, marriage, and divorce (Rahman 2009).

The argument that shari’a law ignores minorities and non-Muslim rights primarily pertains to careers in the government (Mayer 1991). The argument that shari’a law ignores equal status between men and women has been found by many scholars who argue that this is exhibited through multiple areas of the law but most notably in family and criminal. This can be explained by varying interpretations of shari’a that has a tendency to purport the role of women as legal minors dependent upon husbands and/or male relations (Moghadam 2004; Rahman 1983).

Feminist scholars have supported this contention but from a different perspective arguing that the implementation of Islam into a patriarchal society has created a bias (Kandiyoti 1991; Afshar 1996; Joseph 1996; Fargues 2003; Barlow 2008). This result is arguably non-Islamic as major aspects of the Quran and Sunna recommend, support, and argue for advancing the treatment of women resulting, ultimately, in a contradiction between Shari’a law and Islam (as interpreted through the Quran and Sunna) (Mayer 2007; Rahman 1983). This argument is articulated most notably by Ahmed (1992) who argues that Islam at its conception represented a culmination of two competing and distinct discourses within the religion: the pragmatic regulations which instituted hierarchical structures which granted men control over women and rights’ to permissive sexuality, and an egalitarian conception of gender in an ethical framework (6). These two discourses are a result of the prophet’s own culture and also of his vision for Islam (58). The sometimes ambiguous and competing discourses of Islam made its interpretations vulnerable to those in power. It was during the reign of Abbasid Iraq that Islam and the complete subordination of women became one. Essentially the Abbasid Iraqi Empire embodied the first discourse and applied this to their existing cultural practices of gender inequality. This interpretation of Islam allowed for no reworking as it presented itself as authentic and absolute. This interpretation of
Islam was threatened during colonialism and its attempts to decrease gender inequalities during the late 19th century. However, this attempt was seen by political Islamists as a threat to their own culture and thus, reaffirmed their patriarchic practices and interpretations of Islam, and ultimately still debasing women (78).

**Hypothesis**

The next logical step is to begin the quantification process of shari’a based upon constitutionality practice.

H1: The level of implementation of shari’a law will have varying effects (stronger levels of shari’a law will have a positive association with gender inequality).

**Research Design**

This study uses a basic linear regression to observe relationships between variables using the following equation:

\[
\text{GGI} = 0.683 - 0.0384 \text{Shari'a} - 0.0489 \text{Colonialism} - 0.0143 \text{Arab} - 0.00253 \text{ORI}
\]

The sample size is fifty countries which were selected through a random number generator. One year will be examined, 2005. Following, an explanation will be given as to how each variable is quantified, and relevant sources of data of each variable will be presented. In this study the dependent variable (gender equality) will be quantified using the Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum. The independent variable (political Islam) will be quantified by measuring constitutional legitimacy and how shari’a law is practiced (Stahnke and Blitt 2005). Two models will be examined. Model I will utilize Political Islam; Model II will utilize the percentage of Muslims per population (traditional quantification).

**Operationalization**

**Dependent Variable**

Quantitative studies of gender inequality are extensive and can been seen in every corner of social sciences. Regardless of the breadth of the debate about gender inequality across the board it is not what variables represent it best but how to aggregate these variables. Generally speaking, the dependent variable gender inequality can be broken into four categories: political, economic, cultural, and educational. There is a strong consensus among scholars that certain variables do inherently affect gender inequalities with minor discrepancies. These variables are: education, political participation, literacy, levels of freedom and economic activity. There seem to be little quips between scholars about adding or subtracting to the core set of variables mentioned before. For example Donno (2004) adds four more variables to Fish (2002) totaling up to seven dependent variables to represent gender inequalities. Donno justifies this by noting, “women in parliament is an
imperfect measure since some states with rubber-stamp parliaments have high female participation. Moreover, we think it preferable to assess the effect of specific women’s rights rather than of such an aggregated measure” (2004). However, while this critique is trying to improve how past scholars have quantified gender inequalities when tested against other variables, the dependent variable’s lack of cohesion creates mixed levels of statistical significance. The influence of Islam amongst Donno’s seven dependent variables ranges from (-.513 to 2.554). This creates a nuanced meaning for Donno’s attempt to establish a better measure of gender inequalities because the dependent variables individually have such a variation in correlation between independent variables.

This study will quantify gender inequality by the Gender Gap Index. The Gender Gap Index is a comprehensive quantification of gender inequality produced by the World Economic Forum. GGI is based upon four critical area of inequality between men and women: economic participation and opportunity (outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high skilled employment), educational attainment (outcomes on access to basic and higher level education), political empowerment (outcomes on representation in decision-making structures), health and survival (outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio). This index is essentially measuring how a country is dividing their resources and opportunities between male and female populations through economic, educational, political, and health factors (World Economic Forum 2010).

Independent Variable

Studies of gender inequalities and Islam have yet to come to a strong consensus. Scholars have debated normatively about the influence of the variable of Islam (Moghadam 1995; Kandiyoti 1991). In later studies we begin to see Islam quantified through a dummy variable (Huntington), percentages of Muslim's in a population (Donno 2004), and history of Islamic tradition (Fish 2002). The quantification of Islam seems to overwhelmingly produce a strong negative correlation between gender inequalities and Islam (Fish 2002; Donno 2004; Bahramitash 2004; Kenworthy and Malami 1999). Yet, these studies have ignored the relationship between Islam and the state. Shari’a law in the previous studies has seemingly been analyzed through a parochial understanding. The inherent problem in the arguments above is that shari’a law is understood to be the same in all countries, or more specifically that all countries implement shari’a law through the same method. With closer examination we can see that this is incorrect and does not reflect the complex reality in which shari’a is often dealt in. Shari’a law varies immensely between countries through their constitutions and practice. Figure 1 organizes countries by variance of shari’a law constitutionality (Stahnke and Blitt 2005). This is inherent to understanding the influence of Political Islam as "a constitutional text that lays the groundwork for legal and political reconstruction" (6).

We can see through Figure 1 that constitutionality of shari’a law differs immensely. Stahnke and Blitt (2005) note that there is a large misunderstanding of shari’a law. Previous quantifications of Islam (as a Muslim majority) do not account
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for harsh distinctions in Islam. The authors' note approximately 300 million Muslims do not live in predominately Muslim states and these countries vary immensely in their practice of Islam and/or secularism (China, Russia, India, and Tanzania) (8). The authors further conclude that the perception of shari'a is dominated by the provisions found in Afghanistan's constitution which states, "no law can be contrary to the sacred religion of Islam" (5). These constitutional distinctions will be quantified on a scale of O, 1, 2, and 3. For example:

0: If the state is declared secular

1: If a state has no constitutional declaration of shari'a law

2: If a state has declared Islam as the State religion

3: If the state is declared Islamic

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Declared Islamic States</th>
<th>Declared Islam as the State Religion</th>
<th>No Constitutional Declaration</th>
<th>Secular State</th>
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These values will then be added to the practice of shari'a law in each state. This quantification will be adopted from (Rahman 2009). Fatima Rahman argues that focus ought to be on family law because shari'a based laws that are
implemented into this sect of law are both de jure and de facto (12), and this is not the same for criminal or penal laws. Rahman notes, "family law reflects a state's commitment to actualizing Islam as a guide for shaping politics and governing society. It therefore better captures a state's endorsement of political Islam than an assessment of the criminal law sector" (12). Adopting Rahman's model, the main issue area that this study will be using to measure the degree of shari'a is divorce law:

0: Woman has right to file for divorce on all grounds including irreconcilable differences or incompatibility

1: Woman has right to file for divorce on all grounds including irreconcilable differences or incompatibility but she must provide some monetary compensation to husband for release from marriage (the concept of *khul)*

2: Woman has right to file for divorce on limited grounds only, excluding irreconcilable differences or incompatibility

Control Variables

The relevance of control variables were discussed previously. The control variables being used in this study are: levels of democracy, oil/resources, colonialism, and economic development. The dependent variable, gender inequality as measured by the Gender Gap Index, accounts for economic development, and level of democracy and thus, will not be used as a control measure in this study. Oil resources will be quantified using the Oil Reliance Index developed by Michael Ross, which quantifies oil as annual oil exports divided by Gross Domestic Product (2003). Colonialism and Arab culture will be quantified by simply using a dummy variable (0, 1).

Results

Model I:

\[ \text{Rahman 2009 includes child custody law. However, due to the constraints of this study, this aspect of sharia law was ignored. Data for this variable was found primarily using the CIA world fact book and other secondary sources.} \]
The results indicate that Political Islam, oil, and colonialism have a negative and significant association with gender inequality. For every unit change in Political Islam is a -0.03839 change in gender equality; for every unit change in Oil
there is a -0.0019430 change in gender equality; for every unit change in colonialism there is a -0.04888 change in gender equality. Arab culture is largely insignificant.
The r-squared in Model I indicates that a large percentage, 74% can be explained by the data results. For the remaining explanatory factors theory must be relied upon.
In Model II, Political Islam was replaced with percentage of Muslims in a population. The results are puzzling as the only significant and negative correlation with gender equality is a percentage of Muslims within a population. It should be noted that the r-squared in Model II is a meager 44%, which indicates that there is a large portion of this study that can be explained by other variables. This observation posits that exploring the complexities within Islam can allow for a stronger explanation of the results.

In conclusion, the results indicate that if a reexamination and requantification of Islam is given, there is potential for different results as found in previous literature. This speaks to the gap that exists in the literature and the costs of oversimplifying Islam, and its complexities. This research posits, as many qualitative research has done regarding Arab culture that perhaps the cultural theorists have over looked the complexities and idiosyncrasies that exist in varying Arab cultures that practice Islam. Future research needs to explore multifarious interpretations and adaptations of Islam. By breaking down factors which influence Islam in countries we can begin to foster a mature understanding of its implementations.

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